Joanna Southcott, *A Dispute Between the Woman and the Powers of Darkness*  
*(1802)*

The English woman Joanna Southcott was one of the more popular female prophets that arose in the Anglo-American world during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She declared that she was the Woman referred to in the book of Revelation, “clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.” Issuing a series of printed prophecies, she acquired a following numbering possibly in the hundreds of thousands. Towards the end of her life she claimed to be pregnant with the New Messiah, or Shiloh. However, she died before the child’s announced arrival date, apparently not pregnant -- her condition has been diagnosed as either a hysterical pregnancy or a uterine tumor. In 1802, she published a dialogue between herself (as the Woman) and Satan, in which she triumphs over the Old Adversary in a series of debates. Her language, like that of the Bible, is repetitive, incantatory (though seasoned by some very sensational language for the time); her constant refrain that she was “ordered” to write down the Devil’s words reflects her conviction that, by capturing the Devil scribally, his evil could be contained and overcome. Southcott perceived herself to be the latter-day answer to Eve, who was first tempted by the Devil and introduced sin into the world. Southcott’s victory, therefore, was seen by her as a vindication of Woman over the forces that condemned and ruled women from the beginning of time.

This book may appear strange to some of my readers, to say, it is a dispute between me and the Powers of Darkness. Though some may marvel, as they have already done, when I said the Lord would give liberty to Satan to come and offer whatever arguments he had to plead against the justice of his sentence, as being bound not to tempt any that were sealed; and I was ordered to
pen his words, whatever blasphemy he might speak against the Lord, and the justice of his sentence . . . The Powers of Darkness broke in upon me three or four days in the house where I was then sojourning; I was ordered to leave that house . . . and go to a place prepared for me, alone by myself. Some, disputed with me, saying, they could not believe it was the command of the Lord, that I should pen the words of the Devil, after I had been writing by the Spirit of (God) the Lord. This appeared to them contrary to reason: but I was answered by the Spirit of the Lord, if I refused to obey, what I had already done was to no purpose. The Lord Himself contended with Satan about Job; and our Savior suffered Himself to be tempted forty days by the Devil, and disputed with him. And shall the creature be more holy than his Creator? Shall man be more holy than his God? If the Lord has been contending with Satan for man near six thousand years, should I be too holy to contend with the Devil, for my Maker, seven days? If so we all must perish. For we must fight and overcome, that we may have part in the Tree of Life. For as the dispute began with the Devil and the woman, it must end with the Devil and the woman: and the command was given to me that which ever stood out to the end should conquer. If my words stood last, and I held out with arguments, in steadfast faith, against the Devil for seven days, then the woman should be freed and Satan should fall. But if I gave up to the Devil, and Satan conquered in the seven days, then Satan’s kingdom must stand, and the woman must fall. So seven days was to end the dispute between the woman and Satan; and men were then to judge what a powerful adversary the woman had to contend with. But I was promised, the Lord would be with me, by day and by night; that he would not leave me, nor forsake me;--his right hand should support me, and that the Powers of Darkness should not be permitted to appear visibly to me whilst I was alone. . . .
The Fourth Day’s Dispute
Friday, August 6, 1802

[Satan.] Thou eternal bitch! Thou runnest on so fast the Devil cannot overtake thee.

Joanna. Neither do I want to have him. But as I am ordered to pen his words, I shall pen them. But I will not sit waiting for them. If he cannot find arguments ready, let him keep silence; and hear, what I have to say for myself, my Maker, and dear Redeemer.

Satan. Damn thy Redeemer, and thee too; is my power to be overthrown by the desire of a cursed woman? Now I tell thee if God does not renounce that promise, I will bring in a bill against Him and shame Him to his Face. Thou knowest not what is behind. Thou sayest I am a Devil, and so I tell thee now I will be one. Thou sayest my reign is short, and it shall be powerful. I have not done,--so don’t be too ready with thy answers. I see thy laughter, and I will turn it into mourning. The seven days are not yet up; . . .

Joanna. Thou art silent; and I shall begin. I will not wait one minute for thy words. I hear when thou stoppest, and then my answer is ready. This day if thou hast ought to say for thyself, or against the Most High, bring it forth, and I am ordered by the Lord to pen it. But I am not ordered to sit and wait till thou art pleased to speak. . . .

Devil. Thou aggravating Devil! I will appeal to may man of sense, if thou art not enough to provoke the Devil, and enrage all Hell against thee: and now thou sittest and laughest at all thou art writing from me. . . . I will mock thee now; for know: thou art commanded to pen all I say: and so shall say on, God is a God.

Joanna. Thou sayest God is a God. I answer, a just god, a good God, an holy and a true God. heaven and Earth will set forth His praises: but thou sayest, Satan, I am enough to provoke the Devil. And didst thou not provoke the woman to wrath at first, when thou deceivedst her with
lies and broughtest misery upon her? Didst thou not provoke the woman to anger and indignation against thee, when thou workedest in the hearts of men by thy hellish power to crucify her Son? Look at Calvary. — Look at the Cross. — See there, the dear, and dying Lord, crucified, pierced with spears, and hanging on the cursed tree, which thy hellish arts had worked on man to bring on Him. See all the suffering that He went through and see if this was not enough to enrage the woman; and provoke her to wrath and indignation against thee to laugh at thy calamities, and mock when thy fear cometh. It is right and just, Satan, that thou shouldst feel the weight of the woman’s wrath and indignation against thee, who seekedst her ruin from the first. And now thou hast tried, by every art hell can invent, to seek it at last. Now, Satan, look to Calvary, and there behold her dying Lord, and see if justice doth not demand thy guilty blood:—and the woman’s wrath and indignation on thy head. Thou serpent to the woman, her woes of sorrow must now come on thee. . . .
Notes

\[\text{i At the time, this was the estimate of the age of the world.}\]